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THE SOCIALIZED RECITATION

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The socialized recitation is not an invention of modern education. It has existed wherever true education has been given, because the basic principle underlying its use, namely, pupil activity, is the very foundation stone of all education. The definition and principles of education are as constant as the great truths of life, and when we hew close to the line we find that the seemingly new features introduced from time to time are but developments of basic principles due to changing conditions of life, or are attempts to draw the errant wanderers in this great field back to true and safe paths. The socialized recitation is an attempt to direct the course of education into correct channels.

For some years past it has been generally the unfortunate tendency to teach subjects rather than the child. The true meaning of education was beginning to be obscured, and we were following the unfortunate practice of attempting to fit the child to a course of study instead of planning the subject-matter to aid naturally in his development. This is no trite declaration unsubstantiated by fact, because we, ourselves, in most cases have experienced such teaching in our own school days in the elementary school.

Dewey, in his *Schools of To-morrow*,¹ gives many proofs of the universality of this practice. He goes so far in his attack upon such wrong methods of instruction as to state most emphatically that we must abandon all present-day grading, courses of study, and other procedure and get back to nature in our education of the child. In the vehemence of his attack, he swings the pendulum too far to the other side. We cannot agree wholly with such a system as he sponsors, but we can learn much from his observations.

In the early days of our teaching, we all met with the problem of getting the children to act naturally in the classroom. In our

¹ New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1915.

inexperience we often wondered why the loquacious boy or girl of the street or playground became strangely silent in the classroom unless disturbed with a question. We labored incessantly to break such silence and unnaturalness, with little or no success. Finally after much study and introspection, we found that the solution of our problem lay in a complete change of method and practice. Our classrooms have been, and are in very many instances, altogether too formal. We create an air of unnaturalness and expect to have natural development take place within it. The child of the outside world is not forever catechized and prodded by his associates. There are opportunities to discuss naturally the topics that interest him, and he eagerly responds to them. Therein lies our lesson. By construction and administration, our schools easily lend themselves to artificiality. It is our distinct heritage to make the transplanting from nature to hothouse as easy as possible so that the growth may proceed without interruption.

The socialized recitation is an attempt to educate the child in a natural, wholesome manner. Based on the principle that self-activity is a necessary condition for growth, this form of recitation "emphasizes the pupil and uses the subject-matter as a means for the expression of his own ideas and to develop his power." Under this method the child becomes the important issue, and the subject-matter is prepared for him with this end in view. Self-control and activity are the guiding principles. The facts of books are used to create experiences for mental and moral training instead of for information only.

Generically, the socialized recitation may be defined as that form of recitation in which the pupils take an active part. The teacher's work becomes the background rather than the working center of the class period. "The children become members of a working community which adopts the principles of character and of good citizenship as the standard of living and working." It differs essentially from the old method in that it avoids the artificial conditions of the old classroom. Where the pupils are doing and being, there can be no passivity or unnaturalness. Reduced to lowest terms, it is learning by doing. A definition of the term recitation is necessary for intelligent discussion. By recitation,

in this method of instruction, is meant the discussion of new problems as well as the review of previous work or work pursued in supervised study. In other words, the pupils are active in new work as well as in review. Thus, the activity is a continuous process. There is no line of demarcation as to where or when it begins or ends. The pupils occupy the center of the stage throughout the program.

This form of recitation cannot be developed overnight. It has no magical powers that can transform a passive class immediately into an active one. It is a slow and arduous process. A beginning should be made with one subject that lends itself most easily to the give-and-take attitude among class members. When the ice has been broken and a certain ability to talk freely has been developed, then the socializing process is beginning to take effect. It is an easy matter then to socialize completely the recitation in that subject. You will be more than repaid for the work that you have done by the eagerness with which your pupils look forward to this study. You will sometimes be amazed at the thawing out of minds and hearts that were numbed with the coldness of the old methods.

Once a good beginning has been made with one subject and success has been attained in this, you are ready then gradually to extend your organization until all the subjects in the curriculum have been socialized.

In the important work of organization, and in the carrying out of the socialized recitation, the project-problem and supervised study are invaluable aids. These two agencies are very closely related to the socialized recitation and lend themselves admirably to its success. The project-problem furnishes the basis for ready discussion of topics in the different subjects, and supervised study enables the pupils effectively to organize the data that they have gathered so that they may take an active and intelligent part in the discussion. These two factors, together with motivation, are necessary adjuncts to the effectiveness of the socialized recitation.

The successful teacher in this work must possess many qualities that are not demanded of the ordinary teacher. Most of the work must be done before school opens, and, once in the classroom, he

becomes only a member of the class with more or less authority, as required. He must efface himself and yet be the master mind that inconspicuously leads the pupils to conduct the actual work of the recitation. Energy must be ever bent in planning new ways to develop the pupils' initiative and to vitalize their experiences. He must make mental note of the timid and the forward and seek the aid of the other pupils to help the one and curb the other. In addition, the teacher must have a clear idea of the aims of the socialized recitation and a thorough mastery of its procedure, a definite knowledge of the particular problem of his schoolroom and the community, and, most of all, a deep, wholesome interest in and influence upon the young child as an individual who is to be trained for life.

While the socialized recitation is a class method of instruction, the individual pupil is not neglected. In his place as member and not leader, the teacher has a distinct advantage in ascertaining the individual differences in his pupils as manifested in the conduct of the recitation. He has a better opportunity to survey the field and note defects than he had in the old form of question-and-answer procedure, when his mind had to be more closely occupied with the subject-matter and not with his pupils. Furthermore, he can unconsciously enlist the help of the other pupils in aiding those who encounter difficulties. This is good both for the helped and the helpers, as it develops characteristics that are valuable in after life.

Before we leave the work of the teacher, one might be prompted to ask if there is not some teaching that must be done by the teacher himself. Most assurdly there is. The formal presentation of a new topic or step in a lesson must even be a part of teaching. We can never dispense with it because it is fundamental. We can, however, do away with incessant teaching where little chance is given for pupil-participation. This is not true education, and it is what the socialized recitation hopes to supplant. A formal presentation should be made only now and then, as the demand for it arises.

While the socialized recitation must necessarily begin in the individual classroom, it ought to be a school policy to be eminently successful. Where it is carried out in some classrooms and not in others, there is bound to be lack of co-ordination, which is not

wholesome for any school. Besides, it is unfair to the pupils to subject them to widely different methods. There is danger of dissatisfaction and loss of interest in the work as well as a break in the continuity of teaching. It must be adopted by the school if it is to function with any degree of success.

The two most common means of carrying on the socialized recitation are the pupil-teaching method and the general class method. In the pupil-teaching method, one of the pupils conducts the class discussion in a certain subject. He is responsible for continuous activity of the class and is a leader in the discussion. It is his duty to hold the class to the question in hand when there is a tendency to roam, and to inject a little enthusiasm when the discussion tends to lag. There can be no question of the benefits that such training gives for the development of initiative and leadership. It is a valuable schooling for life when conducted properly. There is, however, a tendency to nullify the effectiveness of such a method by not extending the chances for leadership to all. In many instances, only a few do the leading while the others, because they are either timid or weak, get no opportunity to develop. Of course, this is a vicious practice and is not totally different in its effect from the "academized recitation" as conducted by the teacher. It must be avoided, or it were better to abandon the recitation. This mistake often arises from the fear on the part of the teacher that the lesson will not move with such ease and rapidity when conducted by the timid and the weak as when conducted by the strong. Of course, it will not, but it must be clearly borne in mind that education is a slow process, at best, which requires infinite patience and hope. The show lesson, the temptation of every educator, is of practically no value. It is the reason for mistakes in this form of recitation as well as in other forms. If this pitfall is avoided, the pupil-teaching method is an effective way of conducting the socialized recitation.

The general class method, a term used for want of a better name, approaches more nearly the ideal of the socialized recitation than any other. It is founded on the give-and-take proposition, where the pupils give their opinions on questions that have been proposed without any domination of leadership. It is more the

community setting, and it makes for more spontaneity and interest than other forms. In the heat of argument, the timid and weak forget themselves in their eagerness to give their reactions to the matter in hand. Thus, it is more social because it tends to draw all into the fray, which is decidedly wholesome and productive of good. This form of recitation is also much easier to develop, as it approaches nearer to the natural than any other. The teacher's task is not as complicated as in the pupil-teaching method, where he must think of the development of leaders to conduct the class instead of bending his attention entirely to the upbuilding of the social aspect of the recitation. It is not easy to develop the ability to talk among pupils, as we have all learned by experience. This is the major part of the task and hence demands the undivided attention of the teacher.

We do not claim that the socialized recitation is the cure for all the ills of education and that it is the salvation for present-day instruction. We do maintain, however, that it is a constructive attempt to remedy an evil in education that needs immediate attention because it is violating one of the fundamental principles of education in that it tends to destroy self-activity. We do assert that it has distinct advantages which make it worth while. The aim of the socialized recitation is "to do away with passivity in the classroom; to provide opportunity for the natural development of initiative and of activity resulting in originality; to give opportunity for the child to do and to be rather than merely to know."

The discipline practically takes care of itself. A busy, active classroom, with everyone doing, affords scant opportunity for mischief-making. In the beginning, of course, there is some confusion and disorder which gradually disappear as the work becomes effective. This is a natural condition in all transitions and new procedure. Of course, the sponsors of the quiet, orderly, deadening classroom exercise would be shocked were they to visit a live classroom and see boys and girls acting naturally. There are cases under this system which demand care, but for the most part the discipline is taken care of by the pupils themselves. Self-control is developed along with self-activity.

Another important advantage in this type of recitation is the development of responsibility. The pupil is led to see that as a member of the class he is responsible for all conditions that arise in the classroom. The order and appearance of the classroom, the general deportment of the pupils, their speech and habits are all matters with which he is vitally concerned. There are set tasks for which he alone is responsible. He is taught that the room belongs to him and that there are many things which he, as a member of the class, can do to make the class better. The socialized recitation lends itself to the development of this important character trait as no other form of classroom procedure does.

The most important advantage is the development of pupil-activity. It is the foundation stone upon which the socialized recitation has been built. We shall attempt here to enumerate some of the things that it does rather than to discuss it as a factor in education. When pupil-activity has been developed "opportunity is afforded for exchange of ideas; confidence is strengthened; training in social usage is given; training in oral speech and language is provided; the members are made to feel that they are members of a social, co-operative body." The narrow feeling "that they must satisfy a teacher or some other standard is dispelled and in its place the feeling has been created that they, themselves, have something important to do and that they are responsible for its success or failure."

On the other hand, the socialized recitation offers many pitfalls which are likely to ensnare the unwary. Perhaps, because it is pre-eminently social, the chances for making mistakes are amplified. As a matter of practical experience, many serious blunders have been and are committed in its name. Chief among these is that form of recitation where corrections are made and criticisms are given in a parrot-like, systematically planned manner. The pupils file into the room, and a report of past proceedings is read by the secretary. Then they proceed to take up the subject of discussion. A set formula for making criticisms and suggestions is carried out. On the very face of it, we can readily see that this

form of recitation is a direct contradiction in terms. It is decidedly narrow, and little, if any, activity is possible under such an arrangement. There is no evidence that the principle upon which the socialized recitation is based is understood in such a recitation. This is a grave mistake that must be avoided.

Another error that spells defeat for the socialized recitation is the misconception of what activity means in the classroom. Activity is not license, and many an honest attempt to give it a fair trial has been blighted because of the chaos that resulted when the difference was not clearly defined. Talking for the sake of talking is purposeless and, if we would avoid this mistake, great care must be taken in keeping the lesson within proper bounds. The preparation of the work must be so carefully made that all necessary material will be accessible to the pupils. As previously suggested, the major part of the teacher's work is done before he enters the classroom.

Finally, what is more an unfortunate condition rather than a mistake is the habit of attempting to measure the success or failure of this work in terms of time. As we said in the beginning, this form of recitation must necessarily be a very slow and arduous process. Yet what a wreckage do we behold upon the shoals of impatience. Many an honest attempt to put this type of work into being, which from the manner of the undertaking presaged success, has been thrown over in a moment when the test of time was applied. This is decidedly unfair when we stop to realize what a task it is to provide the conditions for a wholesome classroom atmosphere and then to try to open the minds and hearts of the many different characters with which we have to deal. Much harm has been done by those glib talkers and writers who assert that it does not take long and that it does not entail much effort to get pupils to become proficient in such work. Our only answer is that "they know not whereof they speak." The literal meaning of the word education—*educere*: to draw out—answers all skeptics in this respect and drives home the truism that all education must necessarily be a slow process since growth is ever slow and not measurable in terms of time.

To summarize, then, the socialized recitation is an attempt to lead education back into correct channels from whence it has strayed. It is founded upon the basic principle in education that self-activity is necessary for growth. It is closely related with the project-problem and supervised study. There are different means of conducting this form of recitation, but the general class method seems the most effective. The socialized recitation is best fostered when it becomes a school policy rather than a classroom one. The teacher's place in this scheme is one of added importance and responsibility. It is not asserted that no formal presentation by the teacher is necessary. The assertion is made that too much formal presentation is not needed and destroys the self-activity of the pupils. Finally, this type of recitation has many distinct advantages which outweigh the few disadvantages.

In conclusion, we believe that the socialized recitation is an important feature in present-day education. It is sound in principle and workable in practice. It is not the last word in education, nor does it claim to be the only method whereby pupils can be taught to learn by doing. It is "worth the candle" and deserves the honest perusal and study of every live educator.